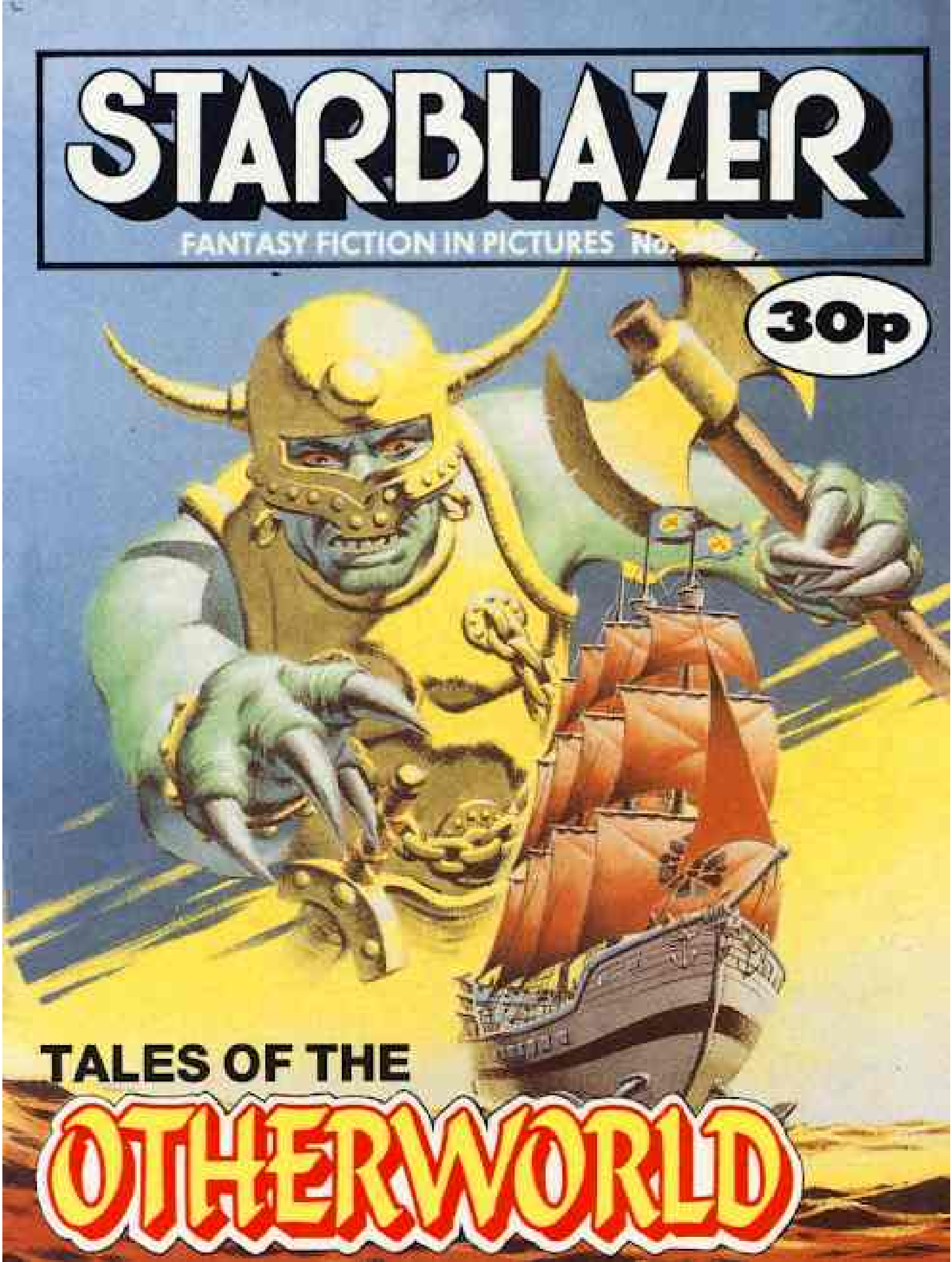
STARBLAZER

FANTASY FICTION IN PICTURES No.

30p



TALES OF THE OTHERWORLD

We at "Starblazer" want to bring you the very best in Fantasy Fiction. To do that we need *your* help.

So that we can produce the kind of stories you want to read, please fill in the questionnaire on this page and send it to "Starblazer", D. C. Thomson & Co. Ltd., 185 Fleet Street, London EC4A 2HS.

If you don't want to cut your issue of "Starblazer", you can copy the questionnaire onto a sheet of paper.

And there's a chance to win a full-colour print of one of our new-style wraparound covers!

The senders of the ten letters which we judge to be the most informative will each receive one of the prints. We want to hear from you NOW!

Name ..... **Age** .....

Address .....

What kind of science fiction do you most enjoy? Please tick appropriate boxes. If you dislike any type of story, place a cross in the box.

SUPERHEROES	☐	☐	**FANTASY**
DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS	☐	☐	**SWORD AND SORCERY**
POST HOLOCAUST	☐	☐	**HORROR**
ADVENTURE	☐	☐	**STAR WARS**
HUMOUR	☐	☐	**DR. WHO**
			MYSTERY

Where do you normally buy your STARBLAZER? _____

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Which is your favourite STARBLAZER story? _____

_____

Which is your favourite character? _____

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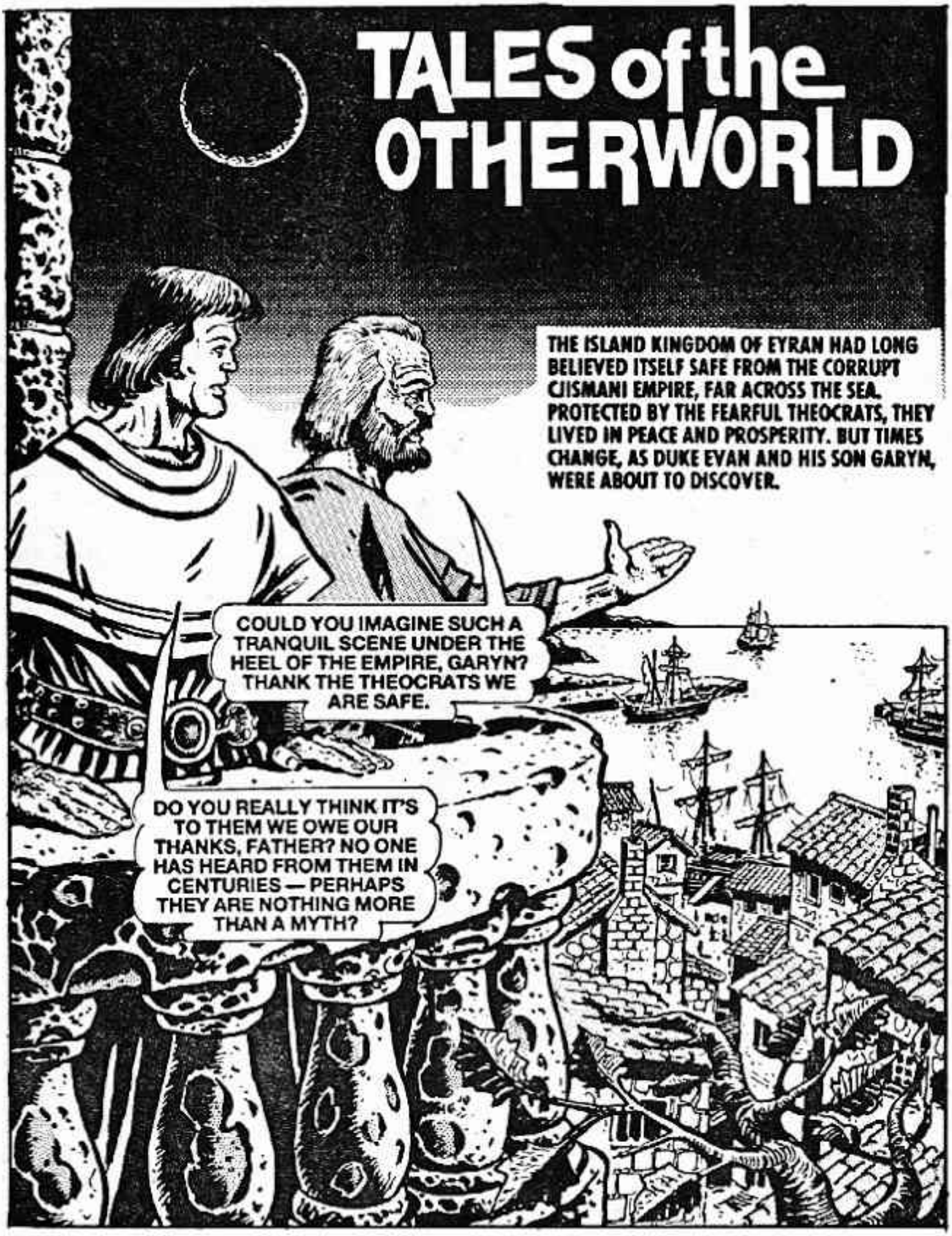
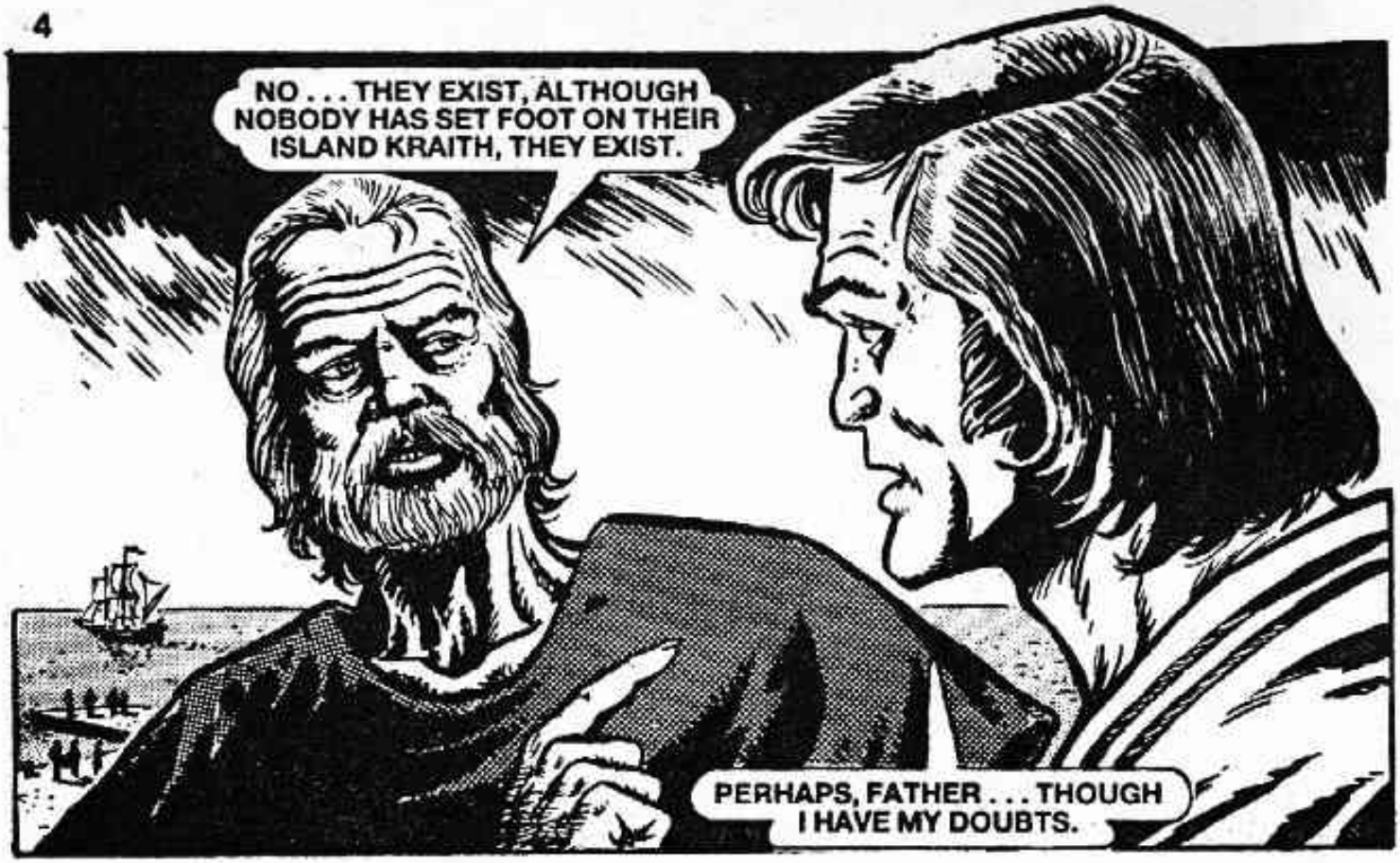
Have you any comments to make about STARBLAZER... good or bad? _____

_____


TALES of the OTHERWORLD
THE ISLAND KINGDOM OF EYRAN HAD LONG BELIEVED ITSELF SAFE FROM THE CORRUPT CIISMANI EMPIRE, FAR ACROSS THE SEA. PROTECTED BY THE FEARFUL THEOCRATS, THEY LIVED IN PEACE AND PROSPERITY. BUT TIMES CHANGE, AS DUKE EVAN AND HIS SON GARYN, WERE ABOUT TO DISCOVER.
COULD YOU IMAGINE SUCH A TRANQUIL SCENE UNDER THE HEEL OF THE EMPIRE, GARYN? THANK THE THEOCRATS WE ARE SAFE.
DO YOU REALLY THINK IT'S TO THEM WE OWE OUR THANKS, FATHER? NO ONE HAS HEARD FROM THEM IN CENTURIES — PERHAPS THEY ARE NOTHING MORE THAN A MYTH?

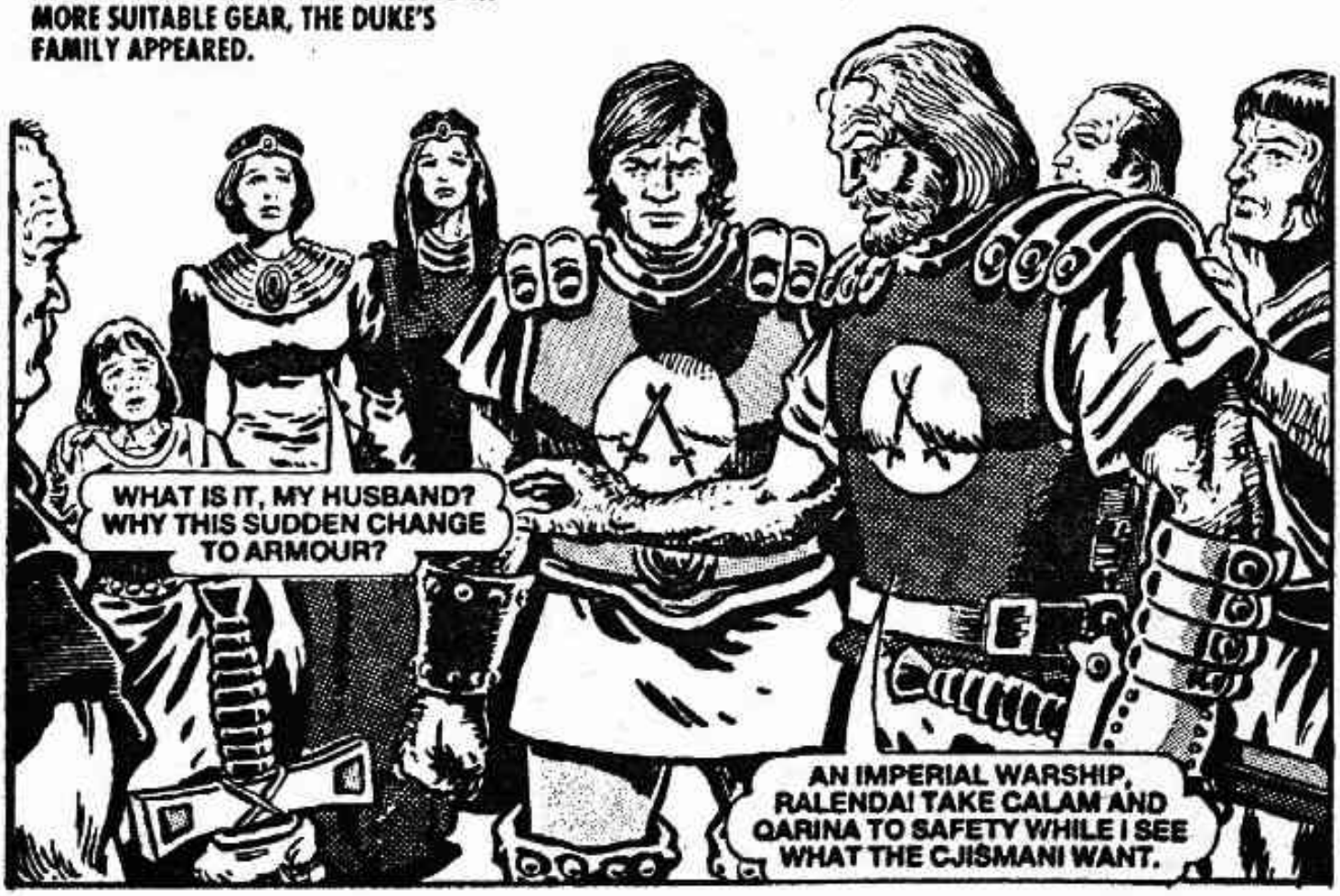

NO . . . THEY EXIST, ALTHOUGH NOBODY HAS SET FOOT ON THEIR ISLAND KRAITH, THEY EXIST.
PERHAPS, FATHER . . . THOUGH I HAVE MY DOUBTS.

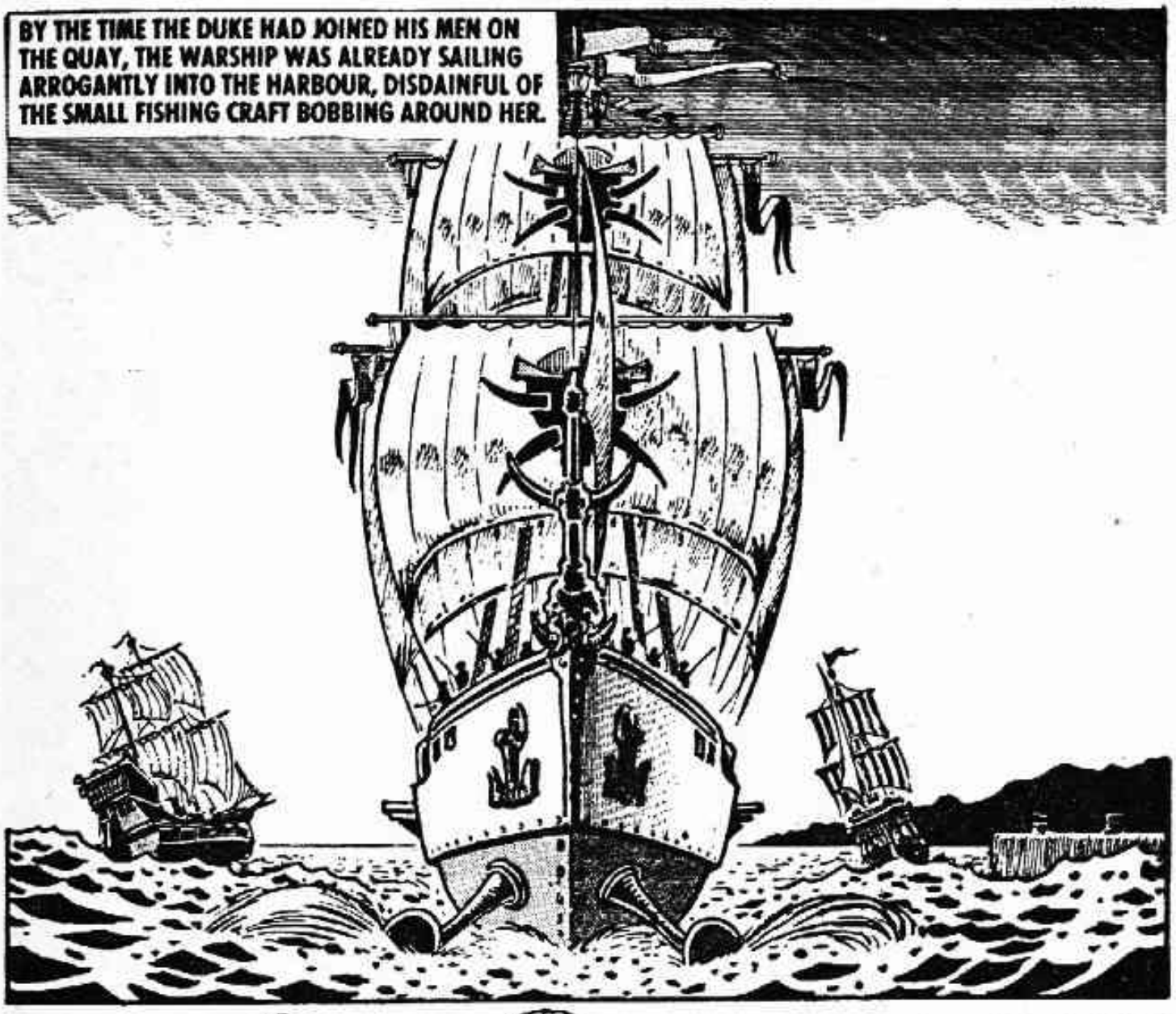
AN ARMED GUARD DISTURBED THEM.
MY LORDS! WE HAVE A REPORT THAT A WARSHIP'S BEEN SIGHTED — COMING THIS WAY!
A WARSHIP? FROM THE EMPIRE?

AYE, YOUR GRACE! JUST THE ONE, AND IT'S FLYING PARLAY SIGNALS.
I SEE IT! BY THE THEOCRATS — WHAT SPEED!

SKIMMING ACROSS THE SEA, THE IMPERIAL SHIP DREW CLOSE TO THE HARBOUR WITH ALARMING SPEED.

AS GARYN AND HIS FATHER DRESSED IN MORE SUITABLE GEAR, THE DUKE'S FAMILY APPEARED.




BY THE TIME THE DUKE HAD JOINED HIS MEN ON THE QUAY, THE WARSHIP WAS ALREADY SAILING ARROGANTLY INTO THE HARBOUR, DISDAINFUL OF THE SMALL FISHING CRAFT BOBBING AROUND HER.

BE READY NOW, MEN. WHO KNOWS WHAT TREACHERY THESE EMPIRE DOGS ARE PLANNING!
I THOUGHT YOU BELIEVED US ALL SAFE IN THE HANDS OF THE THEOCRATS, FATHER.

MOMENTS LATER —
DUKE EVAN OF EYRAN, I GREET YOU AND THE PEOPLE OF EYRAN IN THE NAME OF HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY, ROMIKAL OF CJISMANI. I AM FLEET — COMMANDER JARETH, CAPTAIN OF THE ARCANE SWORDKILL AND EMISSARY OF THE IMPERIAL COURT.
GREETINGS, FLEET-COMMANDER, IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE OF EYRAN AND THE ETERNAL THEOCRATS.
TO WHAT DO WE OWE THE PLEASURE OF THIS VISIT, COMMANDER JARETH?
HIS IMPERIAL HIGHNESS WISHES TO MAKE A FINAL PACT WITH THE RULERS OF EYRAN, THE THEOCRATS. TOO LONG OUR LANDS HAVE LIVED IN MUTUAL FEAR OF THE OTHER'S SORCERY. EMPEROR ROMIKAL FEELS THE TIME HAS COME TO BURY OUR DIFFERENCES AND MAKE PEACE.

THAT NIGHT, THE DUKE ENTERTAINED JARETH AND HIS OFFICERS.
YOU KEEP AN EXCELLENT TABLE, YOUR GRACE. FEW IN THE EMPIRE COULD BETTER IT.
I THANK YOU, COMMANDER. AND I DRINK TO FUTURE PEACE BETWEEN EYRAN AND CJISMANI.
TO FUTURE PEACE, YOUR GRACE — AND AN END TO FEAR OF THE THEOCRATS!
EVEN AS THE FLEET-COMMANDER SPOKE, A SUDDEN ROAR WENT UP FROM THE STREETS BELOW.
WHAT IS THIS? YOUR CREW, COMMANDER — WHAT ARE THEY . . . ?
THEY CELEBRATE A NEW BEGINNING, DUKE EVAN — AS DO WE ALL . . .

. . . THE TRIUMPH OF CJISMAN! MIGHT OVER YOUR THRICE-CURSED WIZARD RULERS!
FATHER! NO!
STRANGE FORCES BLAZED IN THE JEWEL, AND EVAN WAS STRUCK DOWN IN AN INSTANT.
HIS MIND STILL REFUSING TO ACCEPT THE BETRAYAL, GARYN SEIZED THE ONLY WEAPON HE COULD FIND.
TREACHEROUS DOGS! IS THIS HOW YOUR EMPIRE SEEKS PEACE?
MURDERER! LEAVE MY MOTHER ALONE!

IN AN INSTANT, THE LIVES OF THE DUCHESS RALENDA AND CALAM WERE SIMILARLY SNUFFED.
DO YOU REALLY THINK YOU CAN PREVAIL AGAINST THE EMPEROR'S POWER?
OUT IN THE STREETS IT WAS A BLOODBATH, AS THE SHIP'S CREW MURDERED ALL IN THEIR PATH WITH STEEL OR THE CRYSTAL-POWERED LANCES.

GARYN HAD SEIZED A BLAZING DRAPE AND WAS HOLDING THE EMPIRE MEN BACK.
WELL — WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? NOT SCARED OF A LITTLE FLAME ARE YOU?
NATURALLY NOT! BUT IN THIS FLICKERING LIGHT, WE MUST TAKE GREATER CARE. I PRIDE MYSELF ON THE QUICK KILL.
THEN I'LL WASTE NO MORE OF YOUR TIME!
GIVE UP YOU FOOL — YOUR THEOCRATS HAVE FORSAKEN YOU! AAAA . . . !
AND MUCH GOOD WILL THAT KNOWLEDGE DO YOU, CJISMAN! DOG!

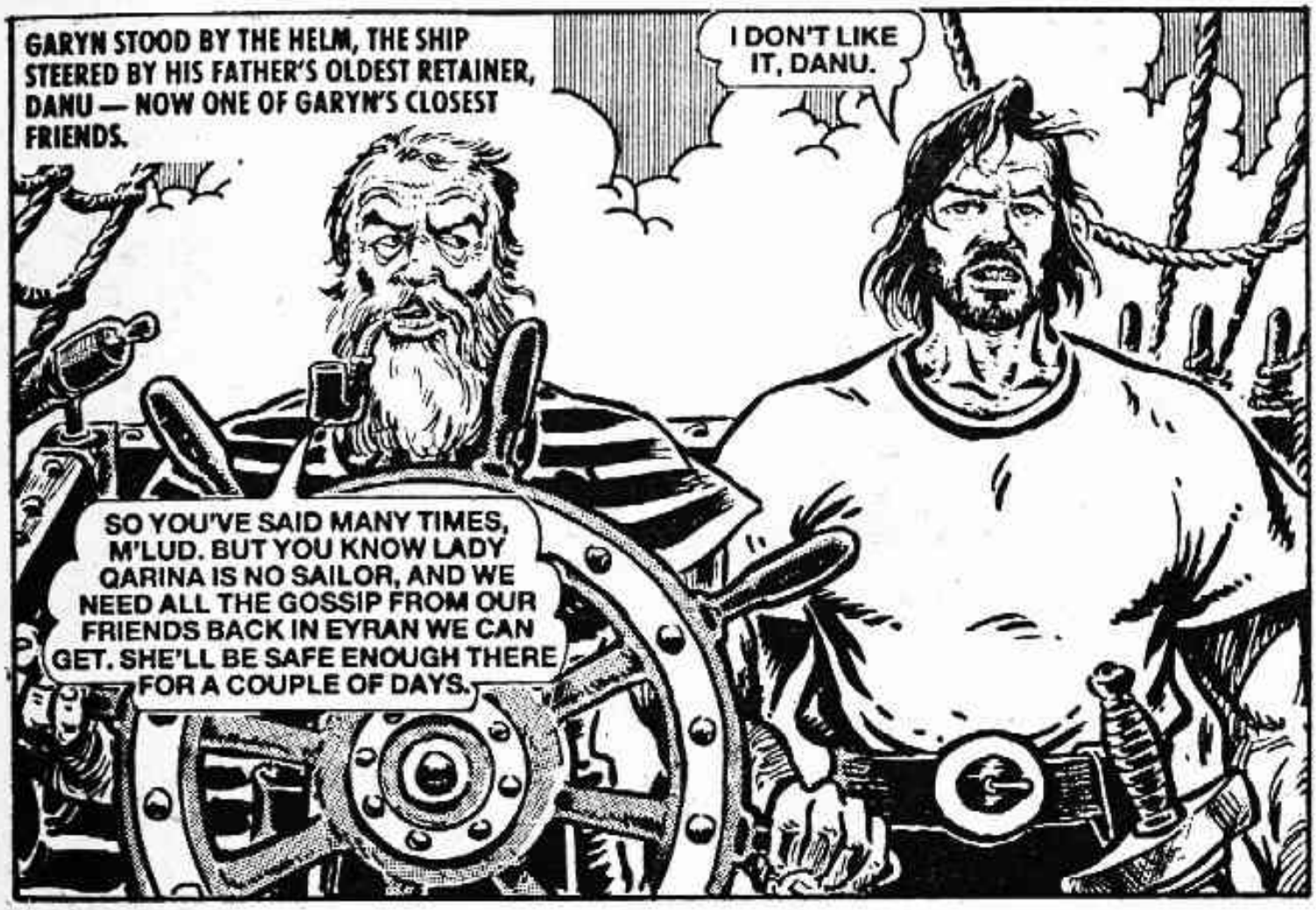
AND THEN THE ROOM WAS SHATTERED BY A BLINDING FLASH OF LIGHT.
QARINA! LOOK OUT!
OUTSIDE, AN IMPERIAL ORNITHOPTER HOVERED, ITS METAL WINGS BEATING LOUDLY. A ROPE LADDER SNAKED DOWN TOWARDS THE SHATTERED PALACE.

FAREWELL, EYRAN DOG! THIS WAS JUST AN EXPLORATORY MISSION — TO TEST YOUR PRECIOUS THEOCRATS! IT SEEMS THEY ARE LITTLE BETTER THAN A MYTH AFTER ALL!
THE NEXT IMPERIAL VISITOR WILL BE THE EMPEROR HIMSELF — TO SMASH YOUR PRETTY ISLAND INTO THE SEA.
DON'T RUSH AWAY, JARETH — I THINK YOU'VE DROPPED SOMETHING!
GARYN RAISED THE FLEET-COMMANDER'S CRYSTAL . . .
. . . AND THREW IT WITH DEADLY ACCURACY.
AAAAAA . . . !

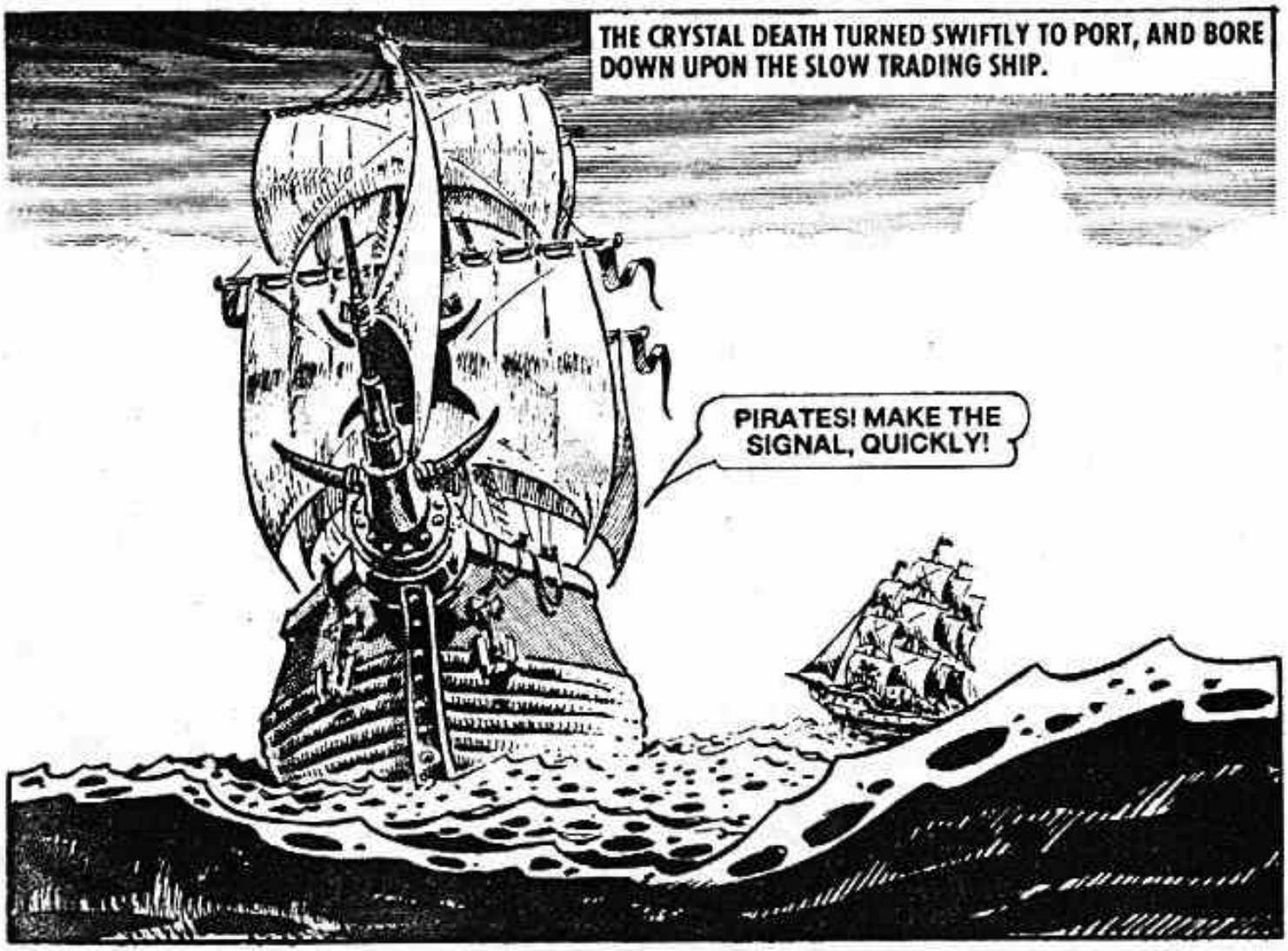
YET IARETH HAD SPOKEN THE TRUTH, THE THEOCRATS COULD NOT — OR WOULD NOT — HELP EYRAN. THE ISLAND WAS DOOMED —

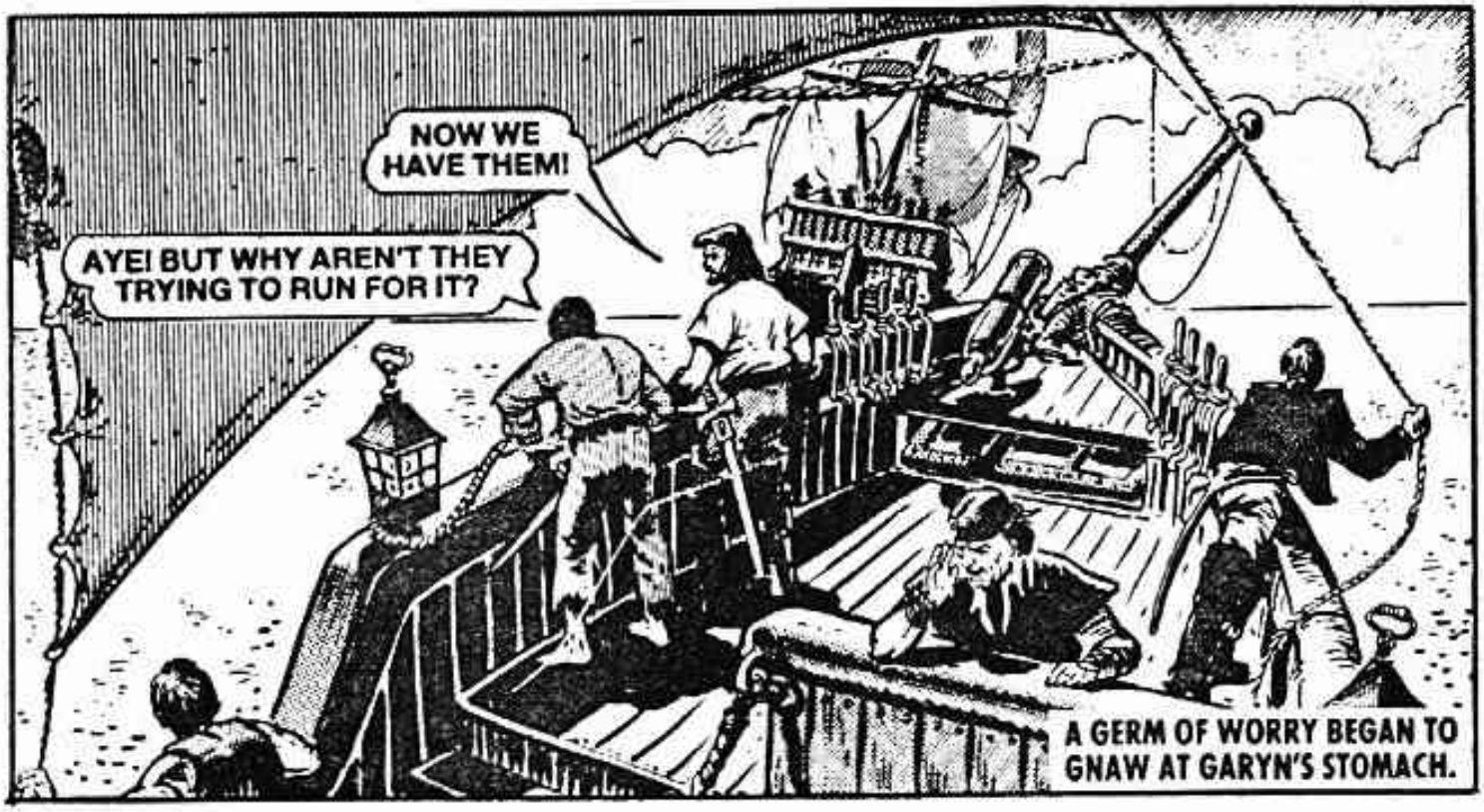
QARINA! GET THE SERVANTS TOGETHER — THOSE WHO'LL COME. WE HAVE TO LEAVE EYRAN WHILE WE STILL CAN!
BUT WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO, GARYN?

EYRAN IS LOST — THE THEOCRATS CAN SAVE HER, IF THEY WILL! BUT WE AND THE SURVIVORS,CAN STILL DO SOMETHING TO REVENGE OURSELVES ON THE CJISMANI EMPIRE!
AND SO THE "CRYSTAL DEATH" WAS LAUNCHED. SHE WAS THE FASTEST SHIP EYRAN SHIPWRIGHTS COULD DESIGN. COMMANDING HER, GARYN TURNED PIRATE — HARRYING THE SLOWER IMPERIAL FREIGHTERS, SENDING MANY TO THE BOTTOM.



HIS THOUGHTS WERE INTERRUPTED BY A CRY FROM ABOVE.


THE CRYSTAL DEATH TURNED SWIFTLY TO PORT, AND BORE DOWN UPON THE SLOW TRADING SHIP.
PIRATES! MAKE THE SIGNAL, QUICKLY!


NOW WE HAVE THEM!
AYE! BUT WHY AREN'T THEY TRYING TO RUN FOR IT?
A GERM OF WORRY BEGAN TO GNAW AT GARYN'S STOMACH.

CAPTAIN! SAIL ON THE HORIZON! IT LOOKS LIKE A WARSHIP, CAPTAIN!
IT IS A WARSHIP! IT'S A TRAP! TURN US ABOUT, DANU — ADD MORE SAIL — GET US OUT OF HERE!
AYE, M'LUD!
FLYING THROUGH THE WAVES FASTER THAN SEEMED POSSIBLE, THE HUGE IMPERIAL WARSHIP CLOSED ON THE CRYSTAL DEATH WITH FRIGHTENING SPEED. IT WAS THE IMPERIAL BARGE ITSELF, EMPEROR ROMIKAL'S "WARRIOR EAGLE".

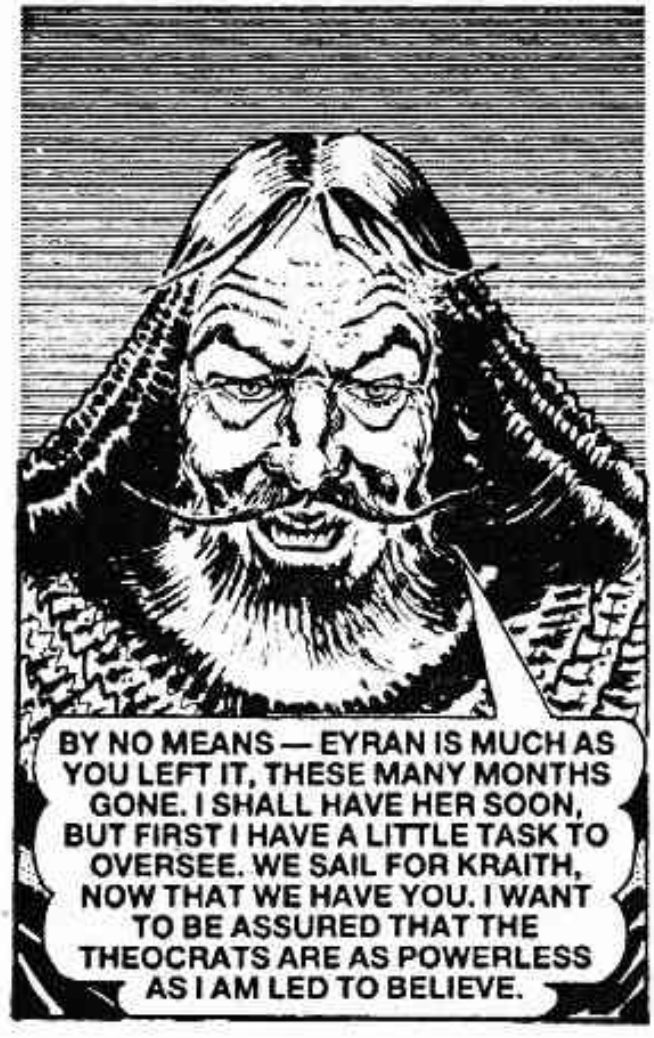
HAVE YOU EVER SEEN SUCH A SHIP, DANU?
AYE, M'LUD. BUT SIZE ALONE WON'T SAVE IT FROM OUR WEAPONS.
BUT DANU'S WORDS WERE PREMATURE — AS TENTACLES OF MAGICAL POWER REACHED FROM THE WARSHIP, ENSNARING GARYN'S SHIP.

GIVE HER A BROADSIDE, DANU! AT POINT BLANK RANGE!
AYE, M'LUD! THAT'LL SINGE THEIR PANTALOONS SURE ENOUGH!
THEIR THRICE-CURSED MAGIC! A FORCE BARRIER! OUR GUNS COULD NEVER PIERCE IT.

THEN A FAMILIAR FIGURE WAS DRAGGED ONTO THE DECK OF THE IMPERIAL SHIP — QARINA. AND WITH HER, THE SMIRKING EMPEROR ROMIKAL HIMSELF.
STAY YOUR HAND, MY LORD DUKE GARYN. WE HAVE SOMEONE HERE WHOM I THINK YOU MAY KNOW.
DON'T LISTEN TO HIM, GARYN . . . RUN FOR IT!
PLAGUE TAKE YOU, ROMIKAL! LEAVE HER ALONE!
CALMLY M'LUD. CALMLY. THAT DOG OF AN EMPEROR HOLDS ALL THE CARDS AT PRESENT — HEAR HIM OUT.

WHAT DO YOU WANT, EMPEROR ROMIKAL?
THAT'S BETTER, YOUR GRACE. I INVITE YOU ABOARD THE WARRIOR EAGLE, TO TAKE LUNCHEON WITH ME AND YOUR SISTER. I HAVE A PROPOSITION YOU MAY BE INTERESTED IN.
ON BOARD THE BARGE, GARYN WAS LED TO THE EMPEROR'S PRIVATE CHAMBERS.
WELCOME, YOUR GRACE. COME, REFRESH YOURSELF — I HATE TO SEE GOOD FOOD GO TO WASTE.
I HAVE NO CLAIM TO THE DUKEDOM, EMPEROR — NOT AFTER YOUR LACKEY JARETH DESTROYED MY FATHER!

AH, YES — I'M AFRAID OUR LATE FLEET-COMMANDER SOMEWHAT EXCEEDED HIS BRIEF THERE. A MAN WHO ENJOYED HIS WORK.
WHY ARE YOU HERE? HAVE YOU COME TO TELL ME EYRAN IS FALLEN?

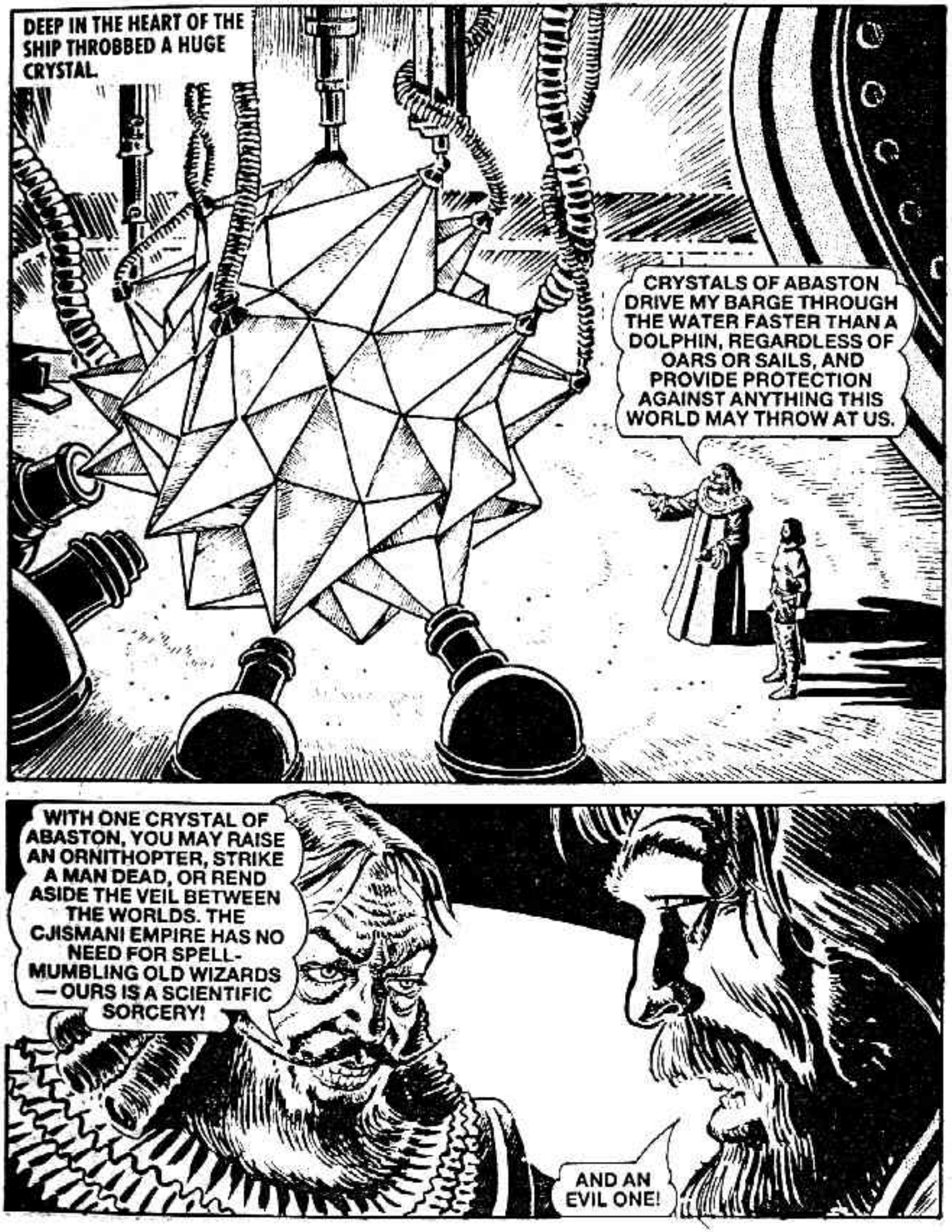

BY NO MEANS — EYRAN IS MUCH AS YOU LEFT IT, THESE MANY MONTHS GONE. I SHALL HAVE HER SOON, BUT FIRST I HAVE A LITTLE TASK TO OVERSEE. WE SAIL FOR KRAITH, NOW THAT WE HAVE YOU. I WANT TO BE ASSURED THAT THE THEOCRATS ARE AS POWERLESS AS I AM LED TO BELIEVE.

THE THEOCRATS ARE DEAD, EMPEROR, IF THEY EVER EXISTED! THEY WERE NO MORE THAN FAIRY TALES TO FRIGHTEN CHILDREN . . . AND EMPERORS.
GARYN! YOU CAN'T MEAN THAT!

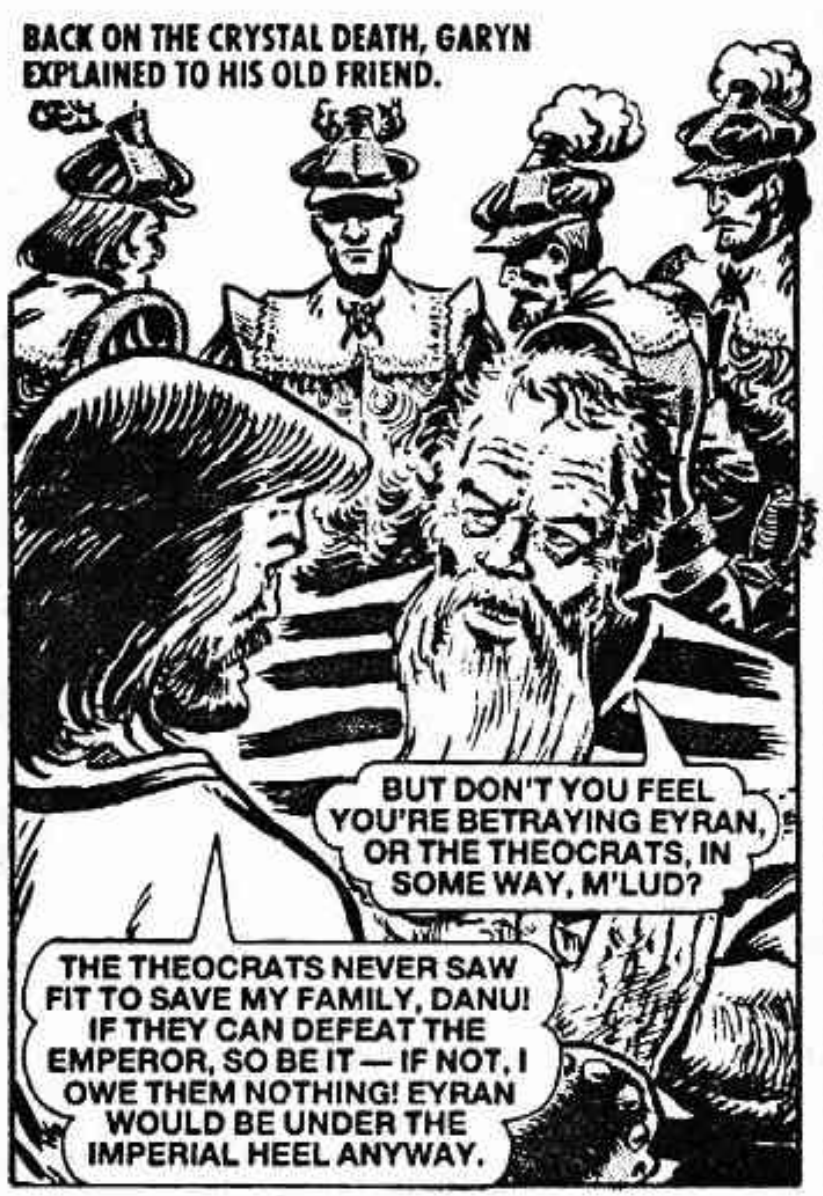
MIGHT I REMIND YOU THAT WE HOLD YOUR SISTER AS — SHALL WE SAY, A GUARANTEE OF YOUR GOOD BEHAVIOUR?
NO NEED, YOUR IMPERIAL MAJESTY. I HAVE NO FAITH IN THE THEOCRATS, BUT IF THEY LIVE INDEED, THEN I HAVE LITTLE TO THANK THEM FOR. I'LL TAKE YOU TO KRAITH.
YOU WERE AN EASY CATCH, MY LORD GARYN. ONCE OUR SPIES ON EYRAN HAD SEIZED YOUR SISTER, ALL WE NEEDED WAS A PLUMP TRADER SET IN YOUR PATH, AND TO WAIT.
AND SO THE TWO SHIPS TURNED NORTH, TOWARDS THE REMOTE ISLAND OF KRAITH — HOME OF THE LEGENDARY THEOCRATS.
I HAD NO IDEA I HAD BECOME SO PREDICTABLE, IMPERIAL MAJESTY.

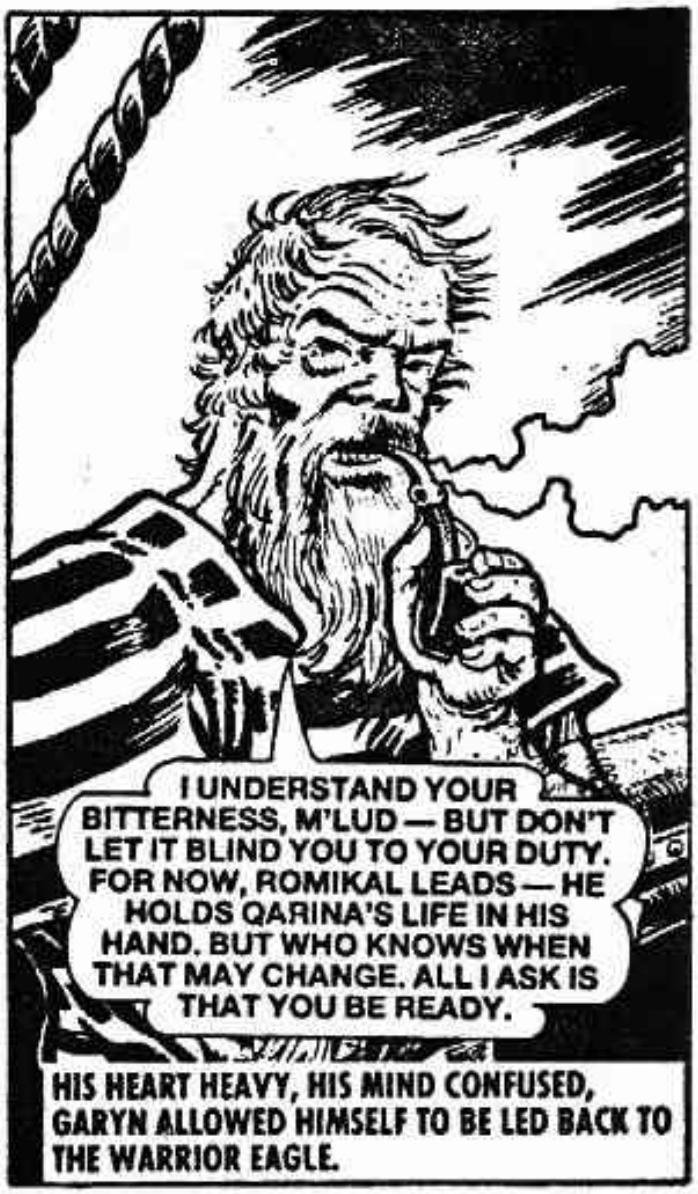
I FIND ALL MEN PREDICTABLE, LORD GARYN — THAT IS WHY I AM EMPEROR.
WITH THE HELP OF SORCERY BASED UPON CRYSTALS.

YOU ARE INTERESTED? COME, I WILL SHOW YOU THE HEART OF MY OWN SHIP.
EMPEROR ROMIKAL LED GARYN DOWN THROUGH WINDING CORRIDORS DECORATED WITH DISTURBING MURALS.


DEEP IN THE HEART OF THE SHIP THROBBED A HUGE CRYSTAL.
CRYSTALS OF ABASTON DRIVE MY BARGE THROUGH THE WATER FASTER THAN A DOLPHIN, REGARDLESS OF OARS OR SAILS, AND PROVIDE PROTECTION AGAINST ANYTHING THIS WORLD MAY THROW AT US.
WITH ONE CRYSTAL OF ABASTON, YOU MAY RAISE AN ORNITHOPTER, STRIKE A MAN DEAD, OR REND ASIDE THE VEIL BETWEEN THE WORLDS. THE CJISMANI EMPIRE HAS NO NEED FOR SPELL-MUMBLING OLD WIZARDS — OURS IS A SCIENTIFIC SORCERY!
AND AN EVIL ONE!

BACK ON DECK—
YOU MAY RETURN TO YOUR OWN SHIP AND EXPLAIN THE CIRCUMSTANCES — BUT I UNDERSTAND KRAITH WILL BE SIGHTED IN NO MORE THAN THREE HOURS, AND BY THAT TIME I WANT YOU BACK HERE. UNDERSTOOD?
YOU'RE TOO KIND, IMPERIAL MAJESTY.
GARYN WAS DISMISSED — THE ANGRY EYES OF QARINA ON HIM.


BACK ON THE CRYSTAL DEATH, GARYN EXPLAINED TO HIS OLD FRIEND.
BUT DON'T YOU FEEL YOU'RE BETRAYING EYRAN, OR THE THEOCRATS, IN SOME WAY, M'LUD?
THE THEOCRATS NEVER SAW FIT TO SAVE MY FAMILY, DANU! IF THEY CAN DEFEAT THE EMPEROR, SO BE IT — IF NOT, I OWE THEM NOTHING! EYRAN WOULD BE UNDER THE IMPERIAL HEEL ANYWAY.


I UNDERSTAND YOUR BITTERNESS, M'LUD — BUT DON'T LET IT BLIND YOU TO YOUR DUTY. FOR NOW, ROMIKAL LEADS — HE HOLDS QARINA'S LIFE IN HIS HAND. BUT WHO KNOWS WHEN THAT MAY CHANGE. ALL I ASK IS THAT YOU BE READY.
HIS HEART HEAVY, HIS MIND CONFUSED, GARYN ALLOWED HIMSELF TO BE LED BACK TO THE WARRIOR EAGLE.

BUT EVEN AS THE PIRATE LORD STEPPED ONTO THE IMPERIAL BARGE, A MASSIVE FIGURE APPEARED BEFORE THEM.
EMPEROR ROMIKAL! THE THEOCRATS KNOW YOUR PLAN — TURN BACK BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE!
DO YOUR MASTERS THINK A MERE APPARITION WILL TURN THE MIGHT OF THE CJISMANI EMPIRE WHEN ALL MYSTERIES OF THE OCCULT ARE MINE TO COMMAND?

I NEED NO ABASTON CRYSTAL TO VANQUISH SUCH AS YOU!
WITH A CONTEMPTUOUS FLOURISH, THE EMPEROR DESTROYED THE CREATURE.
THERE, MY DEAR DISPLACED DUKE — DO YOU STILL DOUBT THE EXISTENCE OF YOUR REVERED THEOCRATS?
I DOUBT EVERYTHING, EMPEROR. INCLUDING THE SOURCE OF THAT MIRAGE.

BY THE SEVEN HELLS! I THINK I'LL MAKE YOU AN ADMIRAL WHEN EYRAN IS MINE, DUKE GARYN! I FIND YOUR PESSIMISM MOST REFRESHING!

WITHIN THREE HOURS KRAITH HOVE ABOVE THE HORIZON — A BLEAK ISLAND OF RAZOR-SHARP ROCKS AND DEADLY REEFS.

AND YOU BEGIN TO EARN YOUR KEEP, GARYN OF LOST EYRAN. HOW DO WE LAND ON KRAITH?
YOU'LL HAVE TO GIVE ME TIME, IMPERIAL MAJESTY. NO ONE HAS EVER BEACHED ON KRAITH AND RETURNED TO SPEAK OF IT.
MY EMPEROR, LOOK! THERE!
NOW YOU DISAPPOINT ME, GARYN. I KNOW FOR A FACT THAT YOU HAVE SAILED AROUND KRAITH MANY TIMES, DRAWN BY SOME MORBID FASCINATION. I THINK . . .
A SINGLE-SAILED GALLEY BURST OUT FROM BEHIND A ROCKY SCREEN, AND RUSHED ACROSS THE WATER TOWARDS THEM.

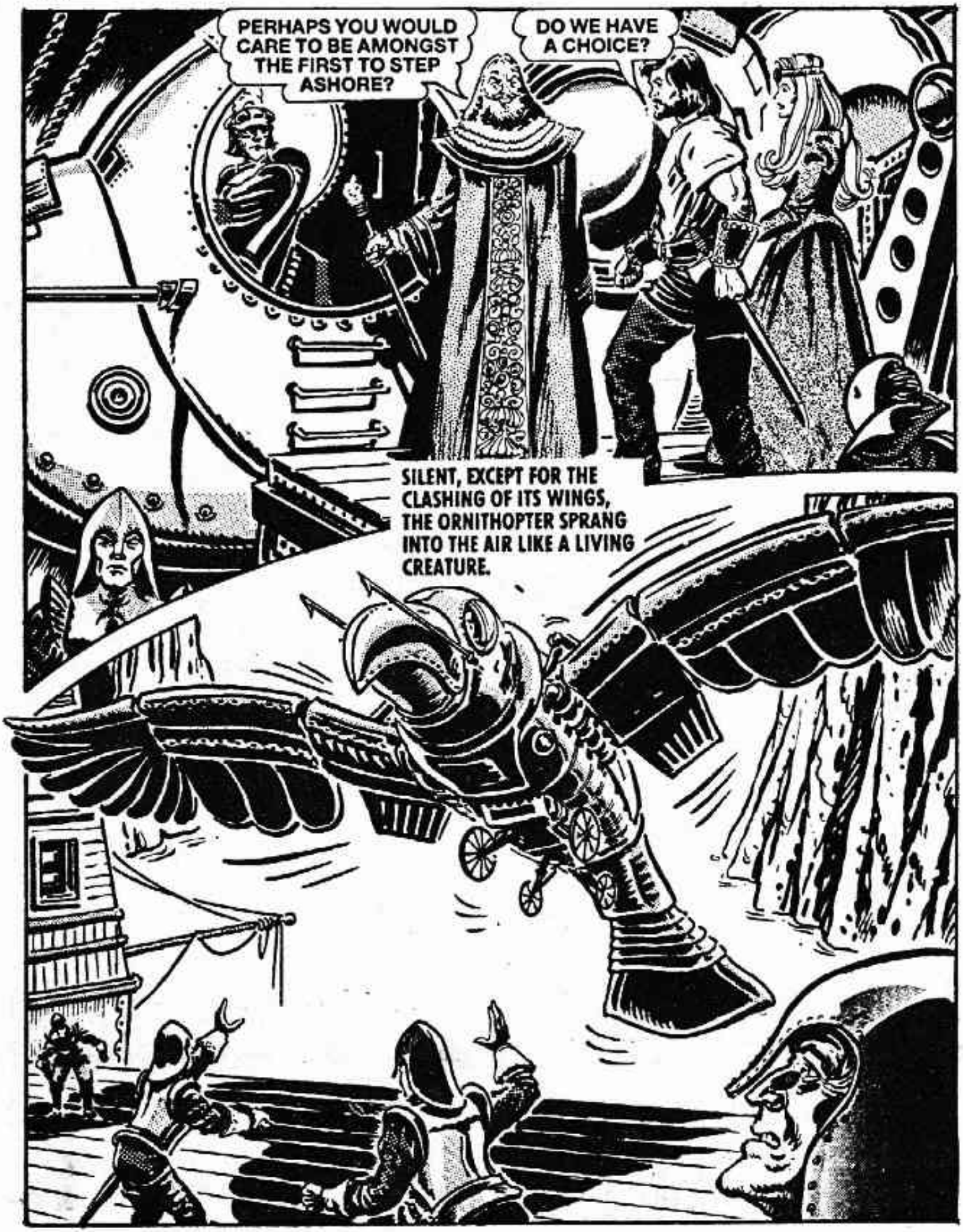
'WARE ATTACK! MARINES TO FORWARD STATIONS!
BUT WHAT ABOUT THE CRYSTAL DEATH? SHE'S RIGHT IN THE GALLEY'S PATH!
AS IF TO ANSWER GARYN'S QUESTION, THE GALLEY MADE STRAIGHT FOR THE PIRATE SHIP — AND WRECKED HER TOTALLY.

AS THE GALLEY BACKED AWAY FROM ITS PRIZE, THINGS FROM THE DEPTHS DRAGGED THE SURVIVORS BELOW THE ICY WAVES.
BUT AS THE MARINES FIRED, THE GALLEY SIMPLY VANISHED.
MOST PECULIAR! THESE THEOCRATS OF YOURS ENJOY GAMES IT SEEMS, DUKE GARYN.
BUT WHAT ABOUT MY MEN? THAT WAS MY SHIP! MY FRIENDS!

MOST REGRETTABLE, I'M SURE. HOWEVER, WE KNOW NOW SOME WAY PAST THAT ROCKY BARRIER. I'LL INSTRUCT THE HELMSMAN.
YOU HEARTLESS DOG!
THE WARRIOR EAGLE EDGED AROUND THE ROCKY POINT, RETRACING THE GALLEY'S ROUTE —
BY THE SEVEN HELLS! A GAP IN THE CLIFF WALL — A WAY THROUGH!

AS CREWMEN USED POLES TO KEEP THE SHIP AWAY FROM THE ROCKS, IT SAILED GENTLY THROUGH THE NARROW CHANNEL . . .
. . . AND INTO A DEEP, CLIFF-SHIELDED LAGOON.

CONGRATULATIONS, IMPERIAL MAJESTY — YOU'VE ARRIVED SAFELY. NOW HOW DO YOU PROPOSE TO SCALE THOSE CLIFFS?
YOU FORGET OUR ORNITHOPTERS, DUKE GARYN!
WITH THESE WE CAN FERRY THE WHOLE COMPANY OF MARINES TO THE CLIFF-TOPS IN MINUTES.
AS HE SPOKE, CREWMEN PREPARED THE FLYING MACHINES FOR USE.


PERHAPS YOU WOULD CARE TO BE AMONGST THE FIRST TO STEP ASHORE?
DO WE HAVE A CHOICE?
SILENT, EXCEPT FOR THE CLASHING OF ITS WINGS, THE ORNITHOPTER SPRANG INTO THE AIR LIKE A LIVING CREATURE.

WITH ABASTON POWER, THE PILOT NEED ONLY WILL THE MACHINE TO LIFE, JUST CONCENTRATING ON STEERING IT. LIKE OUR LIGHT-LANCES, IT NEEDS NO CONTROLS OTHER THAN THE MIND. CJISHMANI IS AN EMPIRE OF SORCERERS!
VERY IMPRESSIVE!

WITHIN MOMENTS, THEY HAD REACHED THE CLIFF-TOP.
YOU SEE, YOUR GRACE — THE EFFICIENCY OF THE EMPIRE? WITH MACHINES SUCH AS THESE, WE HOPE TO SOON ENCOMPASS THE ENTIRE GLOBE — CONQUERING WHATEVER UNKNOWN LANDS THERE MAY BE.

YOU HAVE TO CONQUER KRAITH FIRST, IMPERIAL MAJESTY.

AND THEN THE WATERS OF THE LAGOON SEEMED TO COME TO LIFE AS COUNTLESS WRITHING TENTACLES SWARMED OVER THE IMPERIAL BARGE.
IT WAS ALL OVER IN MOMENTS — THE WARRIOR EAGLE HAD CEASED TO EXIST.

I HAD NOT TIME TO SUMMON EVEN THE SMALLEST ABASTON POWER!
DO YOU STILL BELIEVE THE THEOCRATS' POWER IS WANING, EMPEROR ROMIKAL?

TURNING HIS BACK ON THE CURSED LAGOON, ROMIKAL TURNED HIS FACE TOWARDS THE CENTRE OF KRAITH.

WITH JUST THE PILOT ABOARD, THE REMAINING ORNITHOPTER FLAPPED SKYWARD ONCE MORE.
THE PILOT CAN SCOUT AHEAD FOR US, ON THE WATCH FOR FURTHER DANGER — AND THE THEOCRATS' HOLD, WHEREVER IT IS.

WE WILL HEAD INLAND FOR NOW — TOWARDS THE CENTRE.
IMPERIAL HIGHNESS! THE ORNITHOPTER!

A CREATURE OUT OF THE WORST NIGHTMARE, THE BIRD-THING TORE AT THE ORNITHOPTER, RENDING IT APART LIKE A TOY.
A GYROTHOL! THE THEOCRATS SUMMON HELP FROM OTHER REALMS — EVEN ABASTON POWER HAS LITTLE EFFECT ON SUCH A CREATURE!
THE EMPEROR SENT BOLT AFTER BOLT INTO THE SKY, BUT TO NO AVAIL.

AND THEN, DROPPING THE DESTROYED ORNITHOPTER, THE GYROTHOL SWOOPED UPON THE PARTY BELOW.
DESTROY IT! BLAST IT FROM THE SKY!
DON'T BE A FOOL, ROMIKAL! GET DOWN!
AT THE LAST MOMENT THE EMPIRE MEN DIVED TO THE GROUND, AVOIDING THE SWOOPING TALONS BY SCANT FEET.

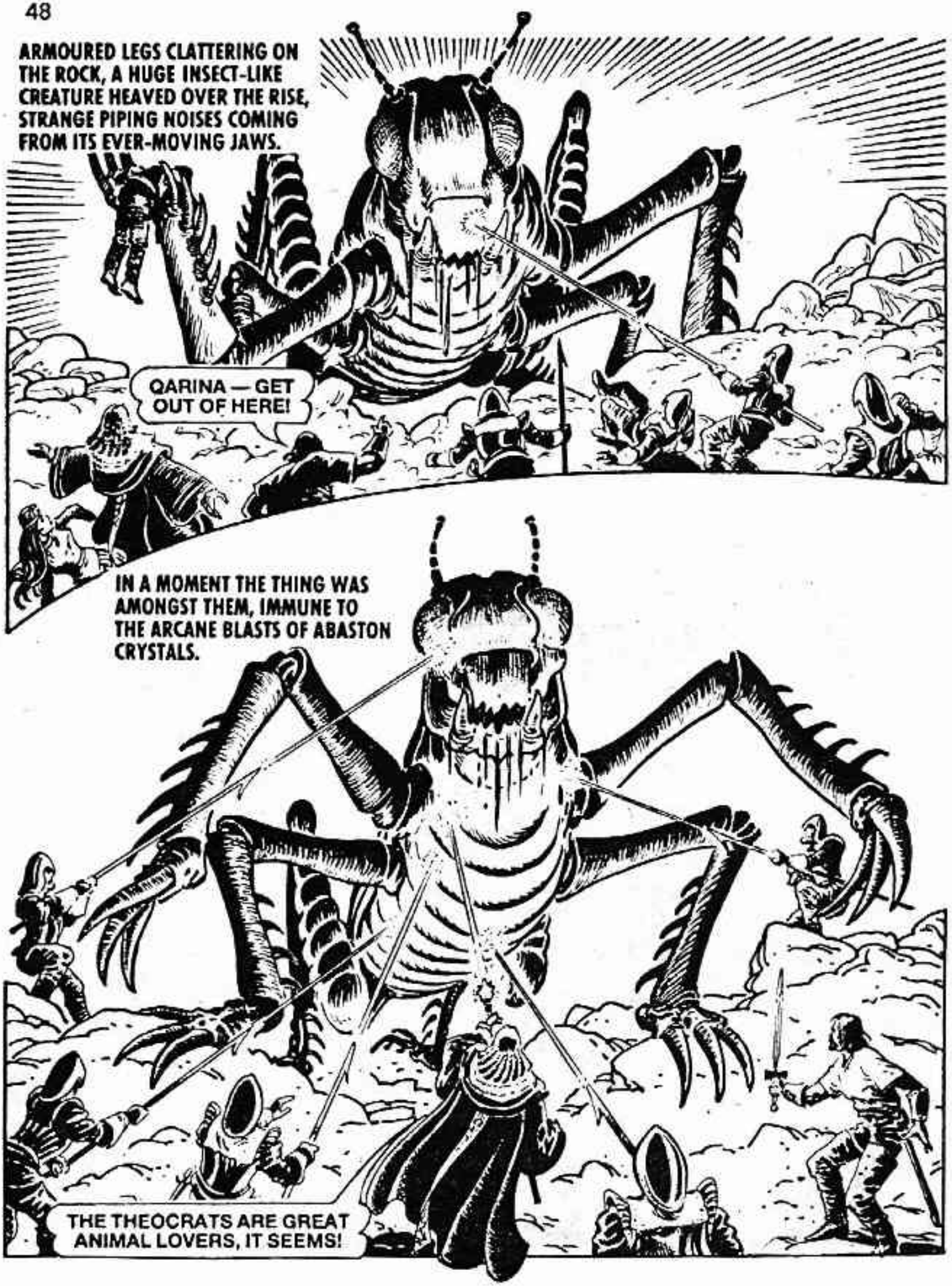
GARYN WAS THE FIRST UP, IN TIME TO SEE THE IMPOSSIBLE BIRD FADING AWAY LIKE MIST.
JUST LIKE THAT GALLEY! AND THE THING IN THE LAGOON TOO, I'LL WAGER!

THEIR STRATEGY IS OBVIOUS! THEY SEEK TO WEAR US DOWN THROUGH CONSTANT ATTACK, TAKING AWAY OUR FORCES LITTLE BY LITTLE. WELL — THEY WILL NOT SUCCEED!
YOU'RE MAD, ROMIKAL! WHY CONTINUE?

I ACKNOWLEDGE NO SUPERIOR POWER! AND REMEMBER YOU ARE NO LONGER NECESSARY. I MIGHT BE JUDGED THE KINDER IF I HAVE BOTH YOU AND QARINA KILLED NOW. A MERCY KILLING, AS IT WERE. NOW COME!

GARYN COULD NO LONGER DOUBT THE EXISTENCE OF THE THEOCRATS, OR THEIR POWER.
IT SEEMS I OWE YOU AN APOLOGY, QARINA. MY OWN BITTERNESS HAS BROUGHT US TO THIS!
I DID HATE YOU FOR A WHILE, GARYN — BUT NO LONGER. ALL I FEAR IS WHAT THE THEOCRATS WILL DO, SHOULD WE EVER COME TO FACE THEM!
WHATEVER THEY WISH. PERHAPS THEY WILL DEIGN TO TELL ME WHY THEY DIDN'T SAVE MOTHER AND FATHER BEFORE THEY METE OUT WHATEVER PUNISHMENT THEY DEEM FIT.

AS EVENING FELL, THEY STOPPED AND MADE A SIMPLE CAMP.
SOMEWHAT BENEATH WHAT YOU'RE USED TO, IMPERIAL MAJESTY?
ONE HAS TO MAKE SACRIFICES. YOU TWO — GO AND SEE WHAT'S BEYOND THAT RISE — THIS CURSED ISLAND SEEMS TO GO ON FOREVER!
PERHAPS WE'VE JUST BEEN WALKING IN CIRCLES — OR THE THEOCRATS ARE WORKING SOME SPELL ON US.
YOU THINK SO? WELL — WHAT WAS THAT?
A SUDDEN, HIDEOUS SCREAM OF TERROR FILLED THE DARKNESS.

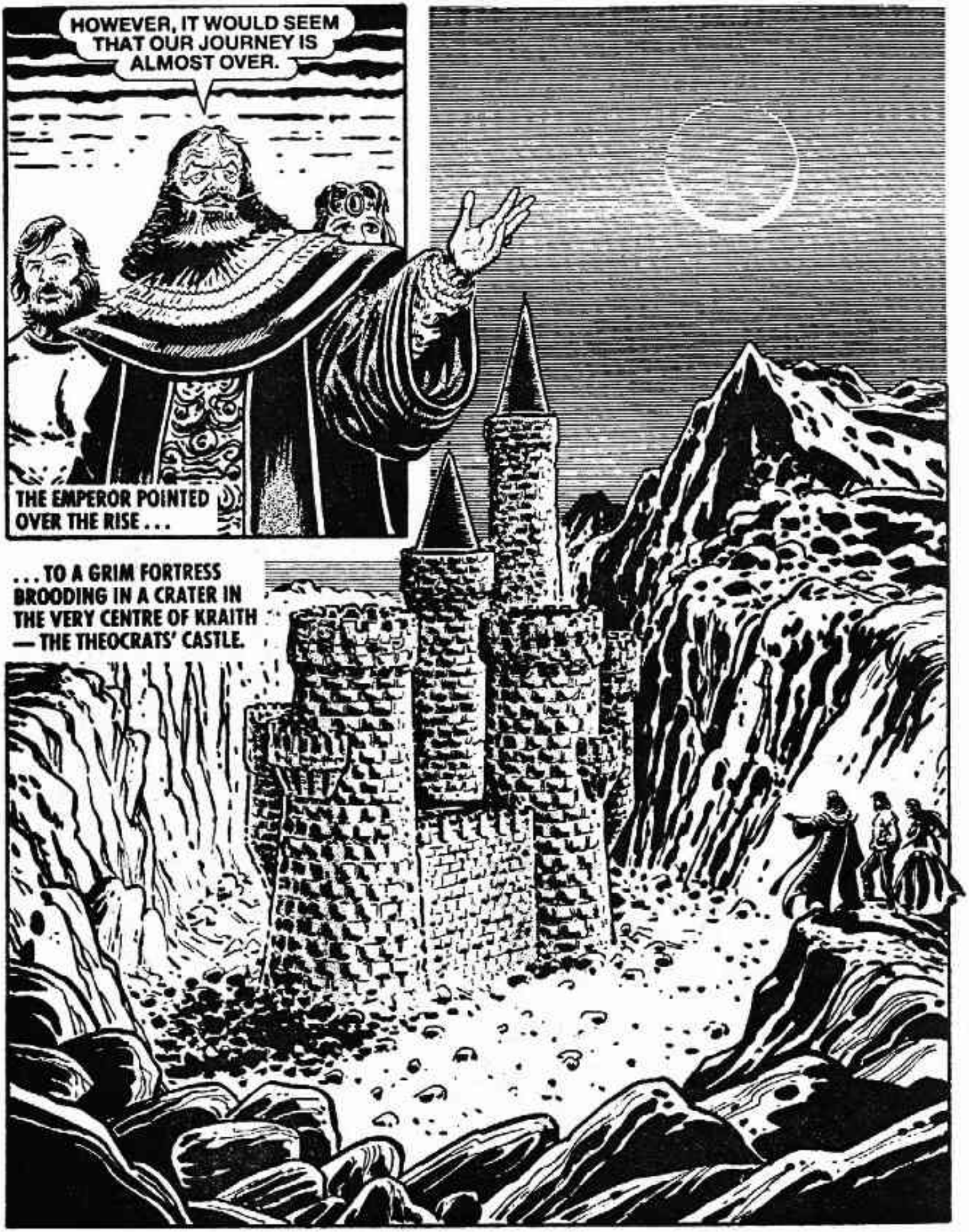

ARMOURED LEGS CLATTERING ON THE ROCK, A HUGE INSECT-LIKE CREATURE HEAVED OVER THE RISE, STRANGE PIPING NOISES COMING FROM ITS EVER-MOVING JAWS.
QARINA — GET OUT OF HERE!
IN A MOMENT THE THING WAS AMONGST THEM, IMMUNE TO THE ARCANE BLASTS OF ABASTON CRYSTALS.
THE THEOCRATS ARE GREAT ANIMAL LOVERS, IT SEEMS!

THE CREATURE SWUNG A CLAW, KILLING TWO MARINES INSTANTLY.
YOUR HIDE'S TOO THICK TO PIERCE, CREATURE — BUT I WONDER ABOUT YOUR GUTS!
COME AHEAD, YOU OVERGROWN PRAWN! SEE HOW MUCH A TRUE SEAMAN FEARS YOU!
GARYN STOOD HIS GROUND AS THE MONSTER CHARGED STRAIGHT AT HIM . . .

. . . THEN RAMMED BOTH LIGHT-LANCES DEEP INSIDE THE THING'S MOUTH.
IF I CAN JUST AVOID THOSE CLAWS . . .
GARYN WILLED THE CRYSTALS TO FIRE . . .
UUUUUNNNHHH!
WITH A DAZZLING FLASH, THE CRYSTALS EXPLODED INSIDE THE CREATURE.

PAINFULLY, EVERY PART OF HIM ACHING, GARYN FINALLY REGAINED CONSCIOUSNESS —
AH — THE HERO AWAKES AT LAST, I SEE. GOOD MORNING, YOUR GRACE.
GARYN — ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

I TAKE IT YOU WILLED THE CRYSTALS TO FIRE INSIDE THE CREATURE ITSELF. I CONGRATULATE YOU — IT WAS THOUGHT ONLY ONE OF US COULD USE ABASTON POWER.
PERHAPS WE ALL HAVE SOMETHING OF THE WIZARD IN US, EMPEROR.


HOWEVER, IT WOULD SEEM THAT OUR JOURNEY IS ALMOST OVER.
THE EMPEROR POINTED OVER THE RISE . . .
. . . TO A GRIM FORTRESS BROODING IN A CRATER IN THE VERY CENTRE OF KRAITH — THE THEOCRATS' CASTLE.

WITHOUT PAUSE, ROMIKAL LED THE SURVIVORS DOWN THE ROCKY SLOPE.
COME! OUR DESTINY AWAITS!
GARYN! THAT FOUL CREATURE DIDN'T VANISH WHEN IT DIED LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE, AND WE BOILED SOME OF THE FLESH. DO YOU THINK IT WAS NATURAL TO KRAITH?
MAYBE! ESPECIALLY IF THE SCAVENGERS BACK THERE ARE ANYTHING TO GO BY.
AS THEY REACHED THE BOTTOM OF THE SLOPE, NIGHT FELL WITH UNNATURAL SUDDENNESS.
DID YOU THINK TO BRING ANY BRANDS?
IGNORING GARYN AND THE EMPEROR, THE CREATURES CONCENTRATED ON THE FOUR REMAINING MARINES, SLAUGHTERING THEM MERCILESSLY.

EVEN AS GARYN SPOKE, A THICK RUDDY LIGHT SPRANG FROM THE ROCK ITSELF, PAINTING EVERYTHING THE COLOUR OF BLOOD.
WHAT NEW HORROR WILL THEY UNLEASH NOW, I WONDER?
YOU'RE TOO MUCH THE PESSIMIST, YOUR GRACE! THESE WIZARDS ARE YOUR RULERS! SURELY YOU'LL BE SAFE FROM THEIR WRATH?
LIKE DANU AND THE REST FROM THE CRYSTAL DEATH?
NO TIME TO DEBATE NOW, YOUR GRACE!
HIDEOUS WINGED TRAVESTIES OF LIFE DROPPED OUT OF THE NIGHT SKY ON TO THE PARTY, SCREECHING A NERVE-GRATING CRY.

FIGHT BACK, YOU FOOLS! THEY ARE ONLY THREE!
THEY'VE LOST HEART, EMPEROR! THE THEOCRATS' WAR OF NERVES HAS ALREADY BEATEN THEM.
AND THEN ALL OF THE MARINES WERE DEAD — LEAVING PIRATE AND EMPEROR TO FACE THE CREATURES.
BE READY, ROMIKAL!
YOU FORGET YOUR PLACE, DUKE GARYN — BUT I AM FULLY PREPARED.

GARYN THRUST UP, AND HIS BLADE EMBEDDED ITSELF —
A PLAGUE ON THIS CURSED SWORD!
THE THIRD CREATURE SEEMS TO HAVE NO INTEREST IN US.

THEN THE CREATURE FADED AWAY—
MY SWORD IS FREE ENOUGH NOW, ROMIKAL!
NO! FOR THE MOMENT YOU MUST BOTH WAIT.
WHAT IN THE NAME OF . . . ?
AN OCCULT BARRIER LEAPT UP BETWEEN THE TWO, ABSORBING THE MAGIC CRYSTAL'S BLAST.
IT WAS THE THEOCRATS THEMSELVES, FINALLY COME TO JOIN THE BATTLE FOR THEIR DOMAIN.
WE WELCOME YOU ALL TO KRAITH — EMPEROR ROMIKAL, GARYN AND QARINA. IT WAS GOOD OF YOU TO ANSWER OUR INVITATION — AFTER ALL, WE SO SELDOM ENTERTAIN THESE DAYS.

I FAIL TO UNDERSTAND YOUR SENILE RAVINGS, THEOCRAT. BUT I AM PLEASED YOU HAVE SAVED ME THE TROUBLE OF SEEKING YOU OUT. GOLENI — FORWARD!
QARINA'S TWO GUARDS STEPPED FORWARD. GOLENI WERE UNSTOPPABLE AUTOMATONS POWERED BY THE EMPEROR'S ABASTON CRYSTALS.
WE EXPECTED NO LESS, EMPEROR. WE KNOW OF YOUR MAGIC-POWERED PUPPETS, AND ARE MOST IMPRESSED, BUT THEY HOLD NO FEAR FOR US.
WITH A FEW SIMPLE GESTURES, THE THEOCRATS REDUCED THE GOLENI TO FRAGMENTS.

NOW LISTEN WELL, FOR THERE IS LITTLE TIME. THE THEOCRATS GROW OLD AND WEARY, AND WILL SOON LEAVE THIS PLACE FOREVER. BUT BEFORE WE GO, THE QUESTION OF THE CJISMANI EMPIRE MUST BE SOLVED. FOR THAT REASON ALONE HAVE WE ALLOWED A CHAMPION FROM EACH SIDE ON TO KRAITH — THE EMPEROR, AND GARYN OF EYRAN.
CHAMPION? I AM NO MAN'S CHAMPION, THEOCRAT!
THEN YOU CHOSE BADLY, WIZARDS! THAT BOY CANNOT HOPE TO DEFEAT MY COMBINED SKILLS WITH ABASTON CRYSTAL AND OTHER MAGICS!
YOU ARE OURS, GARYN! ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOU HAS BEEN OUR WISH — CRUEL THOUGH WE MAY SEEM. WE NEEDED A STRONG SOUL TO FIGHT THIS LAST DUEL — YOU HAVE BEEN THROUGH THE FIRE AND EMERGED.
ON THE CONTRARY. YOU NOTED YOURSELF HE HAS SOME TALENT FOR SORCERY — FROM WHENCE DID YOU THINK THAT TALENT AROSE? OUR CHAMPION WILL FACE YOU AS AN EQUAL.

COMBINING THEIR POWERS, THE THEOCRATS CONJURED A FLAME-BLADED SWORD.
THE SWORD OF KRAITH, GARYN OF EYRAN. USE IT WELL.
NO! I WILL NOT FIGHT FOR THE ONES WHO CONDONED THE DEATH OF MY FAMILY!
THEN USE IT TO SAVE YOURSELF — FOR OUR SHIELD WILL NO LONGER KEEP YOU SAFE!
GOODBYE, GARYN!

GARYN SWUNG BLINDLY, AND TOUCHED THE EMPEROR'S STAFF.
A MAGICAL BLADE INDEED! YOUR THEOCRATS WROUGHT WELL, YOUR GRACE.
BUT MY POWER IS GREATER!
A NET OF WRITHING LIGHT BEAMS SPRANG UP AT THE EMPEROR'S SUMMONS—
I'VE WAITED LONG FOR THIS MOMENT, YOU STRUTTING POPPINJAY . . .
. . . BUT GARYN'S BLADE CUT ITS WAY THROUGH EASILY.

. . . AND I WILL NOT BE CHEATED . . .
. . . AAAAARRRRRGHHHH!
NO! IT CANNOT BE!
AS SWORD AND CRYSTAL MET THERE WAS A BLINDING FLASH THAT ROCKED THE ISLAND.
I CAN'T SEE! I'M BLIND!
UNFORTUNATE! I WOULD MUCH PREFER YOU WITNESSED THE MOMENT I SNUFFED YOU OUT!
DESPITE LOSING HIS ABASTON CRYSTAL, THE EMPEROR COULD STILL DRAW UPON HIS VAST OCCULT KNOWLEDGE.

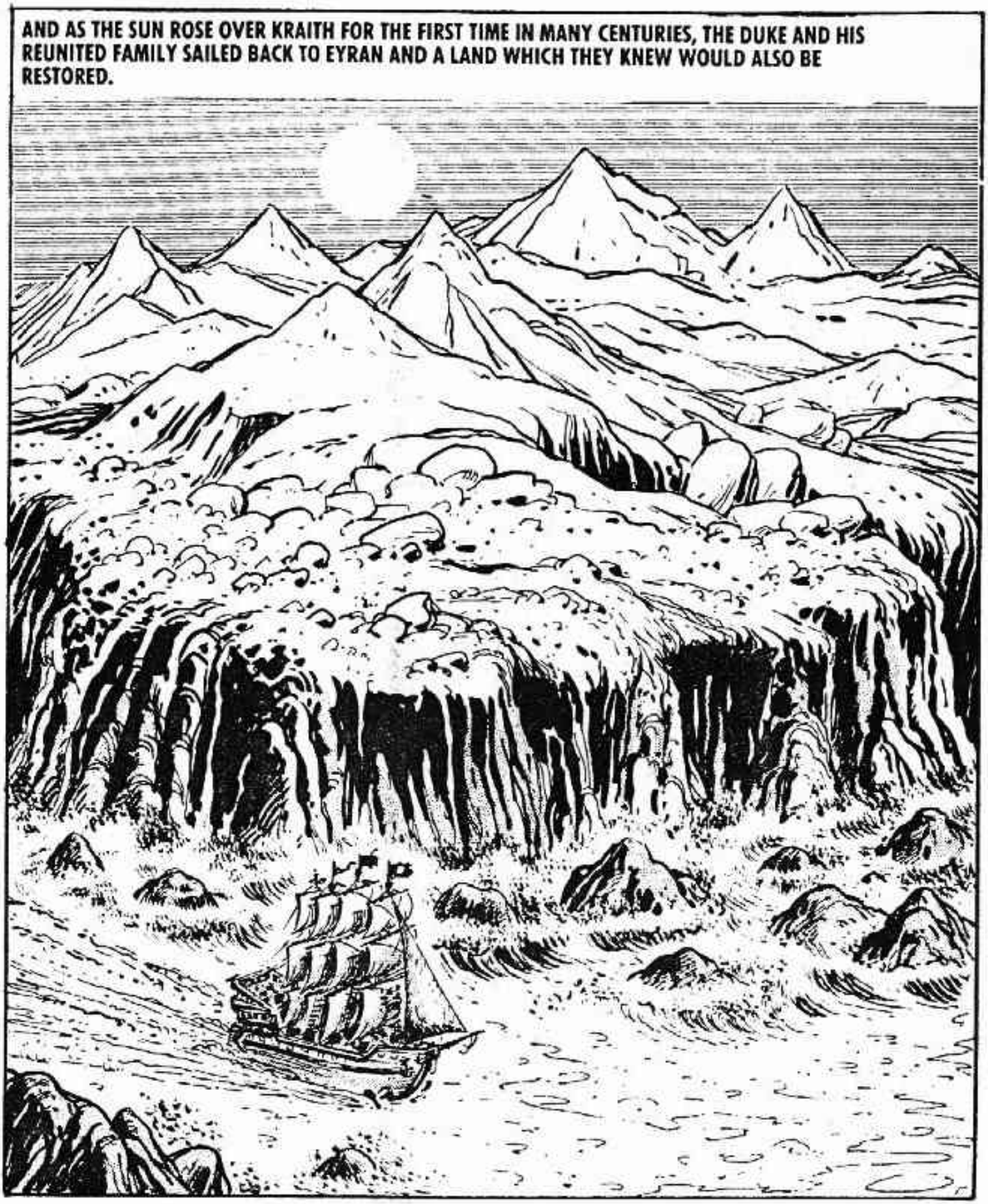
BUT —
GARYN! HERE — HOLD OUT YOUR HAND!
AAAAIIIIIEEEEE . . . !!!
AND NOW, I SWEAR BY EACH OF THE SEVEN ENDLESS PITS OF HELL, YOU WILL BOTH SUFFER!
GARYN LUNGED TOWARDS THE SOUND OF ROMIKAL AND HIS TAUNTING.
KEEP SPEAKING! I SWEAR TO SEND YOU THERE TO ROAST FOREVER, EMPEROR.

YOU FOUGHT WELL, GARYN — AND QARINA TOO. EYRAN IS SAFE, AND THE CJISMANI EMPIRE WILL PERISH — A HEADLESS BEAST WITHOUT ITS EMPEROR. WE MAY LEAVE YOU, CONTENT IN THE KNOWLEDGE YOU NO LONGER NEED US.
AYE, AND FOR THAT MY FAMILY HAD TO PERISH — AND THE CREW OF THE CRYSTAL DEATH! IS THIS JUSTICE, THEOCRATS?

JUSTICE MEANS MANY THINGS TO MANY PEOPLE, GARYN. BUT, BEFORE WE LEAVE YOU FOREVER, PERHAPS THERE ARE A FEW MATTERS TO CORRECT.
THE THEOCRATS ONCE MORE JOINED HANDS . . .

. . . AND A MOMENT LATER, ALL WERE ONCE AGAIN STANDING ABOVE THE LAGOON WHERE THEY HAD MADE LANDFALL.
THE THEOCRATS MAKE YOU A PRESENT, GARYN AND QARINA. BUT FROM THIS MOMENT ON, YOUR FATES ARE YOUR OWN — NO LONGER WILL WE DWELL ON KRAITH, PROTECTING YOU FROM ALL ILLS, THE PEOPLE OF EYRAN HAVE COME OF AGE.

YOU SEE, WE THEOCRATS CAN KILL NOTHING. WE CAN ONLY AID THOSE WE DEEM FIT. THE ATTACK ON YOUR FAMILY, ALTHOUGH REAL ENOUGH, WAS AN ILLUSION. WE SPIRITED THEM HERE.



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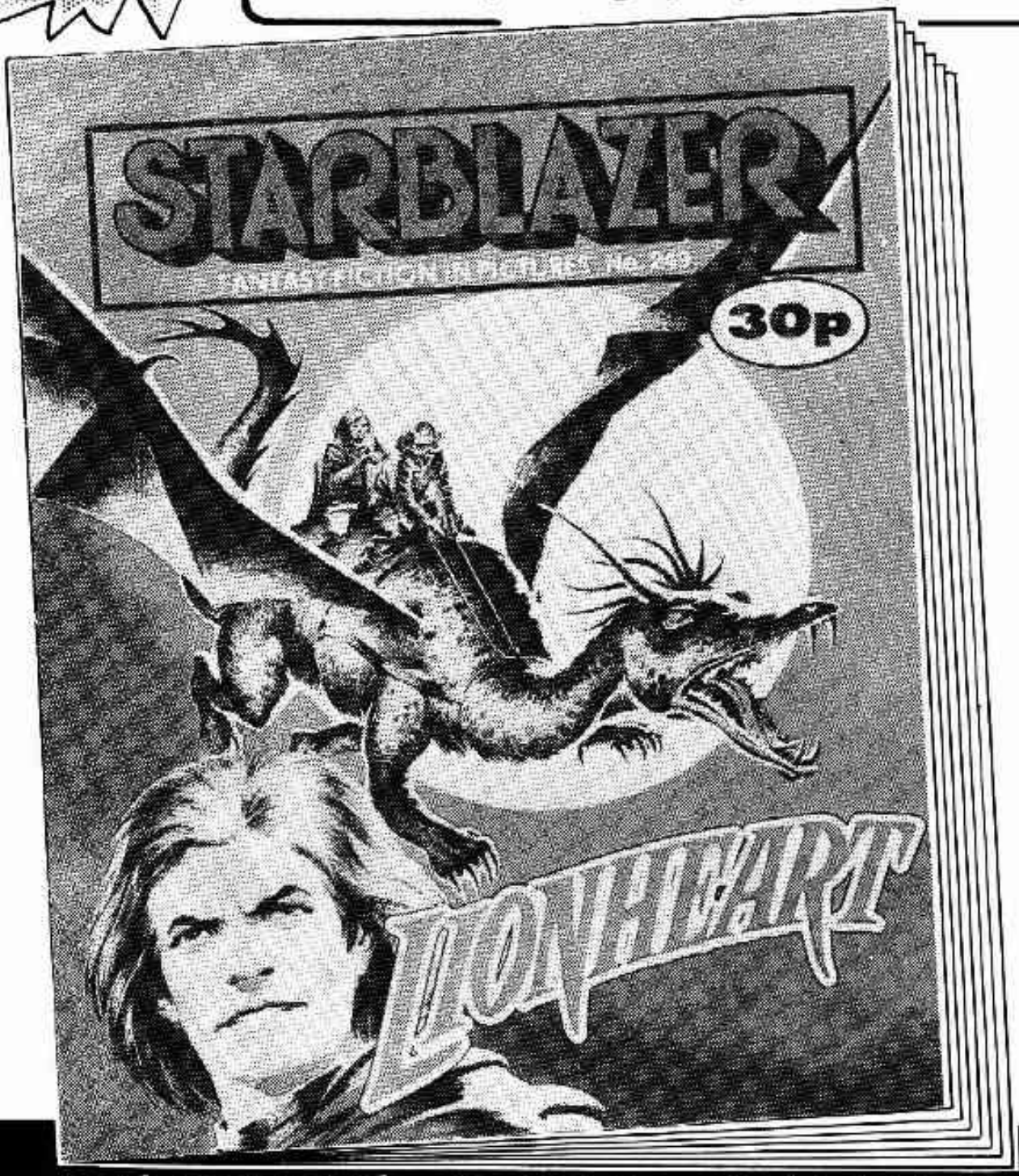
DON'T MISS

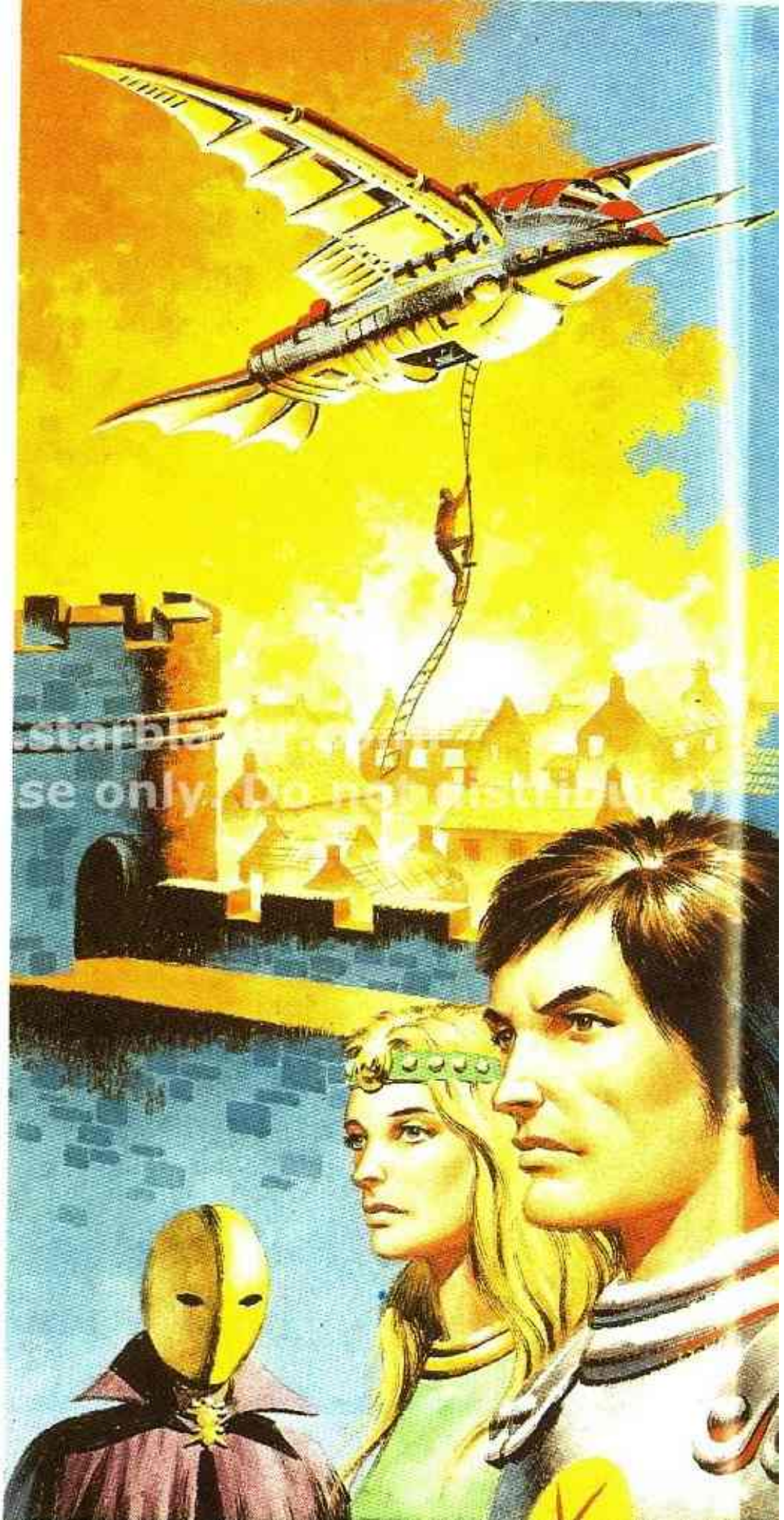
THIS MONTH'S OTHER ACTION-PACKED ADVENTURE



NOW ON SALE

TALES OF THE OTHERWORLD

The Great Book says that there are those who are at peace . . . and such were the people of Eyran, a small, but prosperous island kingdom ruled by Duke Evan and his son, Garyn.

The Great Book also says that there are those who know no peace. They have evil in their souls. Death and destruction determines their every move. Such a people were these of the Imperial Empire of Cjismani.

It was inevitable that these two cultures would clash . . . and one would have to bow the knee — or face extinction. The Cjismani were too arrogant to consider it. Those of Eyran were aware that if they did yield, they would become slaves of the Cjismani . . . and that was worse than extinction.